



For Immediate Release:

November 24, 2014

Protect Against Foodborne Illness this Thanksgiving Prepare safe food by following tips from Public Health

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health would like everyone to enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday by staying safe and healthy. Here are some health and safety tips to keep the holiday celebration festive by avoiding foodborne illness.

“Thanksgiving is a time for family and friends to gather and give thanks for the past year,” said Jeffrey Gunzenhauser, MD, MPH, Interim Health Officer for Los Angeles County. “Enjoy the holiday by protecting your loved ones and guests by preparing your foods properly and cooking your turkey and other meats to appropriate temperatures. Following some simple food handling tips can help prevent foodborne illness.”

Food Handling Tips

Each year Public Health investigates cases of foodborne illness during the holidays that are the result of undercooked food and poor food handling practices. Typical symptoms of foodborne illness (sometimes known as food poisoning) include stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhea, all of which can start hours or days after consuming contaminated food or drink. For healthy people, most symptoms usually go away after a few hours or days without treatment. But foodborne illness can be severe and even life-threatening in older adults, infants and young children, pregnant women, and those with conditions that weaken their immune systems, such as HIV/AIDS or cancer drug therapy.

Raw or undercooked turkey, chicken, or meats can contain *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* or *E.coli* bacteria that cause diarrhea and other problems. These bacteria can multiply rapidly when poultry is taken out of refrigeration and before it is thoroughly cooked. Freezing does not kill these bacteria, but they are destroyed when food is cooked to the proper temperature.

To thaw a turkey any one of three ways (refrigerator, cold water, or microwave):

- **Refrigerator:** Place frozen turkey in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40° F or below). Allow approximately 24 hours per 5 pounds of turkey. After thawing, keep turkey refrigerated for only 1-2 days before cooking.
 - A turkey that has been thawed in the refrigerator can be re-frozen. It is not recommended to refreeze a turkey that has been thawed using other methods.
- **Cold Water:** Place securely wrapped turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. Cook immediately after thawing.
- **Microwave:** Check to see if the turkey is not too large and fits comfortably in the microwave. Check manufacturer’s instructions for the size of turkey that will fit in your microwave oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Cook immediately after thawing.

To cook a turkey:

- When roasting a whole turkey, with or without stuffing, use a food thermometer to make sure it cooks to 165° F or higher. Insert the thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, but not against the bone.



- For safety and uniform doneness, cook stuffing separately in a casserole dish.
- For pre-cooked turkey dinners, eat within 2 hours or refrigerate components separately, then reheat to a temperature of at least 165° F.

When purchasing a fresh turkey, plan to cook it within 1-2 days after purchase. Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys. If not handled properly, any harmful bacteria that may be in the stuffing can multiply very quickly. Frozen pre-stuffed turkeys are safe because they have been processed under controlled conditions. Do not thaw frozen pre-stuffed turkeys. Cook from the frozen state by following package directions.

Other food handling tips include:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the restroom.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating or cutting into them.
- Separate raw meats and poultry from other foods such as fruits and vegetables. Avoid cross-contamination by using separate cutting boards, knives, and platters for these foods.
- Wash cutting boards, utensils, and platters after preparing each food item and before going on to the next item.
- Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil when re-heating.
- Keep hot foods hot. Use chafing dishes or pans with Sternos or other heating devices, or keep foods in the oven at a temperature to ensure they remain at 135° F or above.
- Keep cold foods cold (40° F or below). Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours. Throw out foods that should have been kept cold, but have been left out for more than two hours.
- Leftovers should be used within 3 to 4 days.
- “Taste testing” food or drinks to see if they have spoiled is not recommended.

Raw or lightly cooked eggs or egg products, used in foods such as salad dressings, cookie or cake batter, sauces such as hollandaise sauce, and beverages such as eggnog, can cause food borne illnesses. Avoid eating uncooked items containing raw or lightly cooked eggs or egg products. Substitute pasteurized eggs when cooking these foods. If you get a foodborne illness, seek medical attention.

For more information on safe cooking, visit the USDA website at: <http://www.usda.gov/> or call their toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. For the Hearing Impaired: 1-800-256-7072 (TTY). Food safety specialists are available, in English or Spanish, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time during the week year round. An extensive menu of recorded food safety messages may be heard 24 hours a day.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$900 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

###